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## Functional linguistics as for linguistic applications in Turkish language teaching

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### Abstract

Grammar is defined as “a science which identifies the rules of a language after analysing phonology, syntax and sentence structure” (Turkish Language Institution 2005). Functional Linguistics has gained popularity in the recent centuries after related researches. Again by Turkish Language Institution (2005) defines “function” as: “Any duty, any functionality or ability to perform a duty.” From the distinctions given above, it is necessary to classify and define Functional Linguistics and Functional Grammar separately. Functional Grammar is a Structural Linguistic Trend which deals with the components and the connections between these components of a language in terms of informational functions, which gives priority to informational function to identify and evaluate language facts and finally by this concept, which tries to find out correct linguistic description. As for the methodology the main rule here is to identify the functions of linguistic facts which try to fulfill the informative duties and thereby find the specific value of it in the language system. (Vardar ad, 1998: page 129; by İşcan 2007). “Functional Linguistics tries to identify the main meaningful components of the language system, the connections between these components and their functionalities of informative duties.” (Rıfat, 2000, Page.63).

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### 1. Introduction

Importance of thinking and production of ideas increase in parallel with the scientific developments in of our time. With the development of technology, a fast change happened, and based on this, it has become more important for people to create ideas and process these ideas. In education programs, thinking skills have been included in target behaviors. To have students gain thinking skills, language education has come one step forward as a tool, according to other areas. The reason is that linguists state that a language is one of the major elements of creating and transferring ideas. Ünal (2005) defines language as a symbol used to express ideas.

“Language is the mirror of thoughts, and with a wider meaning, our inner self. Those, who have this idea, state that thoughts are created by words, thoughts can only be developed as much as the number of words in the used language, and the extent and depth of the thinking area of a brain is proportionate with the number of words in the language, then they liken words to hangers on which thoughts are hung.” (Ünal, 2005, p. 7, as cited in Cem, 1978:8).

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“Since a human expresses outwards the products of its intelligence, and of emotions and thoughts, which cannot be bordered; language and thought are intermingled.... A human being can only express the width, depth and meaningfulness in our emotions and thoughts, through language.” (Korkmaz et al, 2007, p.4). Language is virtually an abstract tool for creating and expressing an idea, and for learning how to think. In this context, importance of language and language education increase. Improvement of the language capabilities of individuals contribute to improving their skills of thinking. Language, the most important tool for a human being’s self-actualization, has been the subject matter of many researches and described in many ways until today.

Language is “the totality of codes used by people, who code the information they want to send each other.” (Ünalan, 2005. p. 2). “Language is a natural instrument between people that allow understanding, it has its unique laws and only develops under these laws, and it is a living existence, system of secret contracts whose basis was built in unknown times, a social institution constructed from sounds.” (Ergin, 2005, p.3). “Language is a magical phenomenon, which has too many aspects that we cannot think of instantly, with many various characteristics appearing when thought from different points of view, and with some secrets we still cannot solve today.” (Aksan, 2007). Language is a system of audible signs used by people to tell their requests. These definitions put forward that language is a system, it has some unsolved secrets, its unique laws, and it provides communication between people. We can say that because a language has some secrets, it caused many researches on language throughout history, and caused to have more language education in the education of individuals. Language education has been attempted with grammar education until today. Accordingly, the question “what is grammar and what is the language science that researches language” must be answered. “Linguistics appearance as a science branch is very recent. Previously, the field, what we call “grammar”, appeared, defining the formal structure, sound and stylistic characteristics of language.” (Oğuz, 2005, p. 34). Grammar is defined as “The science that examines the sound, form and sentence structure of a language and defines its rules” (Turkish Language Association [TDK], 2005). Grammar is “the field of study, which aims to detect and consistently describe the rules that create the system.” (Erdem & Çelik, 2011, p.1030). Linguistics is defined by Aksan (2007) as “the science that examines language”. “Linguistics, in its general meaning, was taken as the common name for the science branches, which researched and examined all kinds and all levels of languages, which attempted to find the universals for these languages, and which developed methods for these goals. The most important characteristic of this science branch is that it is definitive, not imperative” (Gemalmaz, 1994, p.173). “In its widest definition, linguistics is the scientific examination of language capability and natural languages.” (Kiran, 2001, p.1). Pedagogy was the science that was most influenced by “linguistics, which became scientific by Ferdinand de Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics” (Kiran, 2006, p. 31).

“Great thought theories, which direct second language and native language education methodologies, are directly based on linguistic and psychological paradigms. The greatest innovation brought by linguistics to language education is that through educational methods, speaking language is brought into prominence ... in contrast to rule-setting prescriptive grammar .... It has reduced the linguistic prejudices by adopting the concept of language level.” (Kiran, 2006, 22).

This understanding also brought different approaches grammar education. In the last century, as a result of linguistics researches, functional grammar gained importance. The word “function” is described in TDK (2005) as: “Work or work capability of an object or person, duty”. Based on these, the concepts of functional linguistics and functional grammar must also be defined.

Functional linguistics is the structural linguistics movement that studies the elements of a language and their correlations in terms of their functions in communication, prioritizing and privileging the function of communication in detecting and assessing language facts, and striving to perform linguistic descriptions through this concept. The main rule in terms of management is to determine the place and duty of facts in meeting the needs of communication, and based on this, detecting their position within the language system (İşcan, 2007 as cited in Vardar et al., 1998, p. 129).

Functional linguistics emphasizes “examining the elements of a language system and the correlations of these elements in terms of their functions in communication” (Rifat, 2000, p.63). “Functional linguistics aims to describe languages. Functional description aims to determine the characteristics of a language, and show what separates it from other languages. Analysis uses communicative significance, language’s function of communication.

“(Karaağaç, 2007, p. 34). A language’s communication function is the basis of functional linguistics, which is one of the major branches of structural linguistics (Vardar, 1979).

The first pioneer of functional linguistics is N.S. Trubetzkoy. With him, S. Karseski and R. Jakobson joined the Prague Linguists environment and established their functional linguistics principles. First, they took Saussure’s distinction between language and utterance (Language is a system formed of icons and rules higher than individuals. Language provides communication as a system of icons. Within this system, there are rules, regulating how these icons are used. Language makes the person who speaks it feel that it is a system of rules and that he/she is under the influence of linguistic society. Utterance defines the individual side of a language. It is the practice of the entirety of the icons and rules by the individuals, who speak the language. In other words, it is the unique usage by individuals of the language they speak.) As a basis in defining the sound unit concept and accepted sound unit as an element of language. Again, on the basis of Saussure’s concept of opposition, they explained the functionality and meaning distinctive characteristics of sound unit. Main assumptions of Prague Linguistics School can be listed as below:

✓ Language is a functional system (System: Entirety of elements that comprise a whole.). In other words, it is a series of languages formed as a result of purposeful language activities of humans. No language can be understood without considering the system it belongs to. Each element must be considered within the system it belongs to, and within the opposition it establishes with other elements.

✓ Linguist must consider language in a synchronic and diachronic approach (Synchronism: Studying language without considering its historical development, as if it is stable in a certain time. Diachronic: Studying language with considering its historical changes and development.).

✓ Prague school aimed to establish the typologies of the systems of world languages. In other words, they aimed to reveal the structural characteristics of world languages.

According to Karaağaç (2007) founder of functional linguistics is French linguist A. Martinet. Functionality was expressed in French especially by A. Martinet and it can be said that he is actually the founder of functionalism. “Martinetist functionalism also covers the opinion that the principle of ‘language must be studied within itself and according to itself’ does not prevent its being considered by taking its relations with society and out-of-language concrete situations.” (Vardar, 1979, p. 25). It studies the elements of language system and relations between such elements in terms of communicative functions. “According to A.Martinet, languages are double-articulated systems and communication tools that specially regulate the data of human experiences.” (Rifat, 2000, p. 64). Double articulation is the analysis of a language in “two different planes in various” units. First articulation can be explained as the combination of the smallest meaningful units; and second articulation can be explained as the separation of meaningful units to meaningless smallest sound unit.

In other words, at the first articulation level, the system consists of existing “smallest meaningful units”. (For example, morphemes and words) This articulation level is called the “grammatical level” in language. Meaningful units in this level are complete icons, each consisting of a signifier and signified... On second articulation level, a semiotic code can be separated “smallest functional units” that do not have any meaning on their own... These fully differential and structural units are repeatable features in the code. These are not icons on their own.” (Dervişcemaloğlu, 2005, p. 1).

Briefly, A.Martinet’s understanding of linguistics is based on language’s communication function (Rifat, 2000, p.64-65). According to him, a language element can have a meaning in a certain context. In other words, a language unit will have a meaning when it joins a higher language unit. Communication is defined with “Martinet’s six-factor model:

- 1- Speaker
- 2- Listener
- 3- Commonly known language (code)
- 4- Certain location and time (context)
- 5- Without any perception problems (channel)
- 6- Message (report)

(Huber, 2007).

In functional linguistics, R. Jakobson is also a leading name. He stated that a linguistic element can only be comprehended in a context, and established “phonology, which studies sounds”. According to him, sounds are included in the field of study of linguistics, with their meaning-distinctive features within the language system. He

puts that there are six main elements in the formation of verbal communication. He lists them as the “speaker, listener, context, message, connection and system” and studies the functions of language in six topics.

Speaker→	Expression
Listener→	Conative
Context→	Referent
Message→	Poetic
Interaction→	Phatic
System→	Metalingual

**1- Expressive function:** It is the language function used by the person, who is the sender in the communication, while expressing his/her thoughts, emotions, experiences and prejudices.

**2- Conative function:** It is aimed at the person, who is the receiver in the communication. These are the effects on the receiver caused by written or verbal language units used by sender. “Expressive function is a function that is used for creating a reaction from and a change in the behavior of the receiver. It is a function that is used for creating a reaction in the receiver and for making him/her do a thing.” (Vicdan, 2010, p. 7).

**3- Poetic function (artistic function):** This covers the creative and artistic usage of language in communication process. “Language, used in a literary function is dependent on its producer’s arrangement, both in shape and content. Because the producer of the text can use the language freely, he/she utilizes words’ polysemy.” (Vicdan, 2010, p. 8).

**4- Phatic function:** It is the function used for determining whether there is a contact while establishing communication through language; in other words, channel-checking function. “The function used for checking communication channels is the phatic function.” (Vicdan, 2010, p. 8).

**5- Referent function:** Briefly, language’s information-providing function. In other words, they are prose-type expressions.

**6- Metalingual function:** It is the function in which language is described by language. “Metalingual function is explaining a language element by another language element.” (Vicdan, 2010, p. 8).

Above, we provided general information on linguistics and linguists, who studied functional linguistics. In addition to these Üstünova (2002) says that analyzing grammar only on sentence level cannot be deemed sufficient in terms of functional linguistics and the idea that “above-sentence” units must also be taken into account in “syntax” is becoming prevalent. Those who advocate this approach emphasize the following principles.

a- Sentences and language units must be studied with the integrities they establish cohesions and coherences with. In other words, language elements gain a value within an entirety.

b- Sentences must not only be considered formally, they must be examined with their deep structures. So, a sentence must be studied with both its logic and style units.

These statements bring into mind functional grammar, which is presented as a solution to teaching problems in today’s language education. Gaining prominence as of the 1970s, functional grammar, which emerged on the basis of functional linguistics, must be explained in this context.

## 2. Language education and functional grammar

Results of educational researches and statements of Turkish and literature teachers, who are the practicers of language education, reveal that there are various problems in language education. Some of the problems are as follows:

- ✓ **Language education being especially focused on tests:** This causes students and teachers to approach language units only from a formal angle and causes a rote-learning language education. Student opts to

memorize the information from the books, instead of listening to the teacher, memorizes patterns instead of an actual language education, and in tests, searches for the questions of the patterns he/she memorized.

- ✓ **Some students having the prejudice that language is abstract and they cannot understand it:** This also negatively affects the interest/attention to language lessons.
- ✓ **Some students and people having the thought “we already know our language”:** This understanding is a major problem for both language learning and for the development of language.
- ✓ **Language education being classifier and limiter:** Categorizing language units and approaching language through only these categories is also an important problem.

Language, as it has been taught until today, is not only a communication tool. Language is also not only a live existence or a natural existence. Language is a phenomenon, whose existence and development depends on the natural language capability of humans and its usage. Language is a value that emerged and developed as a result of human's need to name and make sense of the objects and organisms around it. Development of language capability in humans is also a multidimensional process. In this process, the main function of language is its act-utterance actualization. A teacher's saying to one of the students in her class: “I elect you chairman.” is an act-utterance function. Individuals are programmed to learn the language from birth. Human brain's readiness to learn a language is called the language capability. Learning a language by using this language capability without realizing is called language acquisition. Individuals acquire a language by learning the words, structural rules, operation and usage terms of the language through language capability. First step of language-acquisition is early childhood. This is the critical period for language acquisition and the basis of native language acquisition is founded in this period.

Native language is “the language learned from mother and close family environment, then from interacted environments, settling in the subconscious of humans, and forming the strongest connections of individuals with the society.” (Erdoğan & Gök, 2008, p. 2). Native language plays a key role in the development of increasing individuals' power of thinking, establishing a healthy communication with the society in which he/she lives in, acquiring his/her culture and transferring to future generations, succeeding in educational life and in other science branches, and acquiring a second language. Individuals can expand and express their thought world as much as they master their native languages. Producing ideas is one of the most important characteristics of today's modern societies and this is proportionate with using the native language. Native language is a skill that all individuals gain without realizing it. In order to improve this skill, every society has certain goals within their own education systems. They achieve these goals through the education of their native languages. Beginning from primary school, individuals get a language education throughout almost all their educational lives. This language education is provided by grammar lessons.

After individuals begin to use their native languages, they begin to gradually understand the grammar structure of the language they speak. An individual can know his/her native language within its full meaning, only by knowing the systems of that language. Functional and structural features that form a language are hidden in the grammar structure of that language. An individual's mastery of his/her native language is proportionate with his/her knowing the grammatical structure of the language he/she speaks. In language education, transferring the cultural codes of the individual's society becomes important (Erdem & Çelik, 2011). All of these show that in language acquisition, the importance of grammar education cannot be ignored. “Grammar activities performed improperly, despite this fact, shall not contribute anything to a child's language skills.” (Erdem & Çelik, 2011). Language skills individuals were attempted to be improved by a rote-learning based language education; however, researches revealed that rote-learning and prescriptive grammar education is unsuccessful. One of the reasons of a rote-learning based language education is that there is a test-based educational system. A functional language education must be performed instead of grammar memorization, and students must be given a language education on the axis of moving from rules to definitions. In all definitions of language, it is highlighted that language is a system. Taking a part of a system, in other words, of an entirety, and trying to explain this part by isolating it from the other parts, will not give us the correct data. If language is a system, all elements of this system must be explained in this system.

Language is a system that is comprised of many parts. Functional grammar is an approach that considers language as a system. It is an important idea in functional grammar that a language must be considered as an entirety from its smallest part to its greatest part. In functional grammar, a language is not an entirety of rules; while studying a language, the language's usage conditions must also be taken into account. Not only the language's

formal units, but the functions gained by morphemes within the context form must be examined. In this context, there are many definitions on functional grammar.

“Functional grammar, as a concrete grammar branch, studies the structural units of a language (text, sentence, sentence compositions, skeletal-syntactic organizations etc.), their functions and usage rules.” (Musaoğlu, 2003, p. 22.). “Functional grammar... works to establish the usage, reason of preference, functions of duty and meaning elements of a language within a certain text.” (İşcan, 2007).

“In Linguistics, functionalist approach is described as an approach based on communication that works to describe the role and functions of a language in different communication contexts. In this approach, it is researched how language allows people create meanings in their interactions with each other; however, meaning in a language cannot be determined clearly every time.” (Ercan & Bakırlı, 2009, p.42).

In functional grammar, concepts are defined in three different ways:

1. **Semantic Functions:** Defines the roles of referents in a situation defined by the predicate.
2. **Syntactic Functions:** Defines the point of view in which the event in the expression is presented regarding the subject and the object.
3. **Pragmatic Functions:** Defines the information structure in the wider communication media in which the founders are present. (Ercan & Bakırlı, 2009).

“In traditional grammar books, although all of these parameters are taken into account, it can be seen that the most emphasized parameter is the semantic parameter... in functional grammar, syntactic parameter is prominent because functional linguists, semantic parameter aims to have a definitive role in determining only a language’s description, while syntax parameter aims to have a definitive role in classifying and identifying its categories. (Vardar, 1979, 42).

“Language is an entirety of systems. There are many elements that have a job this system. Grammar is what organizes the combination of these elements and allows them to become meaningful units within a system.” (Erdem & Çelik, 2011, p. 1032). Grammar education aims to improve the language skills of individuals. In grammar education; rote-learning and prescriptive approaches are methods that are too far away from improving students’ language skills. In functional grammar, language elements function with values they gain in a system. Teaching language structures by having students perceive them through functional grammar approach, can be more effective for improving basic language skills.

### 3. Conclusion and suggestions

Native language and grammar education importance as the importance of Language in humans’ thinking skill and in its expressing this skill is understood. In this study; functional linguistics, which had started to explain concepts such as language/utterance distinction, synchrony/diachronic, signifier/signified, system and code, as stated in “Course in General Linguistics” by F. Saussure, who established the foundations of structuralist linguistics theory, and the main premises of functional linguistics were explained, and functional grammar, which was shaped over these main premises, was attempted to be explained. Besides linguistics’ being a very new science branch that studies languages and the systems that form languages, it can be said that it has a structure that direct linguistics researches. In the study, although functional linguistics, which is shaped on the basis of structural linguistics theory, seems different, we see that it attempts to explain the ideas of structuralism and acts as its continuation. This can be assessed in two ways: First; structural linguistics set a basis for language researches and functional linguists applied this to make today’s language researches more scientific. Second, functional linguistics work by the main principles of structuralism and this can prevent having different points of view towards language.

Adopting functional linguistics’ applications, functional grammar advocates a grammar education that takes studies language in its communication function and language elements in their own system, instead of a rigid, prescriptive and rote grammar education. Instead of prescriptive and rote language information created by test-based education system; having each language element included in its own system can be an important tool in language education and especially in native language education. In modern language education programs, development of basic language skills (reading, speaking, writing, listening and grammar) has prevailed over memorizing grammar rules. In this sense, for giving basic language skills to students and especially in native language teaching; the idea that functional grammar must be used in language ‘shall be usage environment, can be applied.



Seen as an integrity of molded rules and developed by repetitions according to settled judgments; language can actually be considered as an important function in solving the problems of self-actualization, self-expression, freedom, picturing the thought world, which people personally manage and shape every moment. The idea that using the language and language education are actually producing a new thing at every moment can motivate students for language education. Also, the idea that language is not an integrity of rules to be memorized, and that if language is approached functionally, the individual would be more successful in his/her tests, can increase the sense of language in students.

Instead of having students understand the rules of language; having them understand the usage aspects of language, in other words, language – utterance distinction, may be a more effective way to increase their language skills. In native language education, having individual to perceive the grammatical aspects of the language they use can make native language education more effective.

Tests are applied in almost every country in the world, good or bad. The language questions of such exams being more related to the use of language, can contribute more to the development of students' language skills. It can be said that prescriptive approach in native language education limits the development of the of thought for individuals. Therefore, instead of the classic grammar practices, language education can be given by emphasizing the communicative function of language.

In this study on functional grammar, a remarkable element is that in the field of functional grammar, there is still not a satisfying work. It is discovered that in this field, there is a need for a study on functional grammar and how to implement functional grammar in educational environments. Especially, researches for the use of functional grammar in educational environments are expected to be guiding educators, who try to use this approach.

Functional grammar approach might help candidate linguists recently starting their academic careers. Some of these candidates have the idea "Language has already been studied, certain rules are established, and what can I do in this field?" Approaching language in terms of functional linguistics will reveal that this perception is wrong and will open new horizons for researchers.

Especially, if the teachers, who perform language education, have information about functional grammar and approach language education from a functional point of view can be useful in giving native language education and basic language skills.

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